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THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART CLEVELAND, OHIO

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A BUDDHIST VOTIVE CARVING

An important specimen of Chinese Buddhist stone carving has been presented to the Museum by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph King.

It bears the date 440 A. D., which makes it the earliest example of Chinese votive stone carving that has come to our notice, but we welcome the accession not wholly because it is unique in date, but because it reveals a true religious and artistic spirit the of Great Wei period, and, in this particular, stands as an example of Buddhist art comparable in every respect to similar expressions of the early art of Western civilization.

Though it may be that we fail at first to accept this simple truth, it will come with a new and full significance when memories long forgotten are awakened by further association and a continuous and unbiased interest in Oriental Art. One of the greatest Oriental scholars has said, "In order to understand a masterpiece you must lay yourself low before it and await with bated breath its least utterance." And before Oriental masterpieces, especially those of religious character, we need to cultivate a proper attitude. If we would not miss the rich reward that each message brings we must seek the mood of the master where'er we find it. Fortunately for us, in the instance of art, it may be intelligible however foreign in expression. It need not go unheard because the religious thought expressed is pagan and has long been looked upon by us askance, or because we fail to recognize the technique, or the form, or the symbols. Is it not better that we forego these thoughts that tend to steer us far from true art appreciation, and be receptive, anxious to receive the message of this so-called pagan art so long delayed. Let us by mutual concession meet upon a common ground of art appreciation when we contemplate this carving.

It is quite possible that this stone was cut within the actual lifetime of that famous Buddhist, Kumarajiva, whose renown was so great in his day that a Chinese emperor prepared to send

an army to India, if necessary, in order to bring him as a teacher to China. It is known that he arrived in China about 401 A.D. He translated many of his Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, and was one of the first of a long line of teachers who found their way from India to China. Who knows but he influenced the unknown sculptor whose tool fashioned this very piece!

The seated figure in the center of the composition with left foot resting on a lotus and right drawn up across the left knee is the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. At the right and left other Bodhisattvas are standing in various attitudes of adoration, two with hands folded in prayer, and four holding offerings, apparently fruit. The standing figure above the Bodhisattva is Amitabha, the God of Endless Light, looking down from heavenly heights surrounded by ten heavenly fairies. Two dragons above uphold and encircle a pagoda surmounted by three jewels representing a Buddhist Trinity; Buddha, his Doctrine, and the Clergy. On the pedestal block below are three Bodhisattvas and two female figures with wings. The reverse side of this block has the inscription well incised, which gives the date and a general description.

The Eastern world that centered round this stone when it was made, was full of love and joy and hope. Buddhism taught it these—the inscription on the reverse tells us so—and it happened that a whole village by agreement respectfully erected this carving, first, for the sake of his Majesty the Emperor, past ancestors, living representatives, and coming generations; and second, for the sake of all living beings and things that have created life. Thus they prayed for the ever-ready and eternal blessing of the Buddha seeking an answer to their prayers. Thus they dedicated this statue of Buddha for the 'preservation of everlasting prosperity and happiness' over the signature of the chief donor, Wau Ch'ung-hu.

We are exceedingly pleased to have this early carving, which is primitive but large and broad in conception, with the first touches of the delicacy and finish that culminated in the sculpture of the T'ang Dynasty (VIIth to early Xth century), and withal a dated piece. Dated pieces of Chinese stone carvings are still scarce and this piece with its well defined style adds materially to that long line of study which is yet to besiege us.

M.



A Buddhist Votive Carving, dated 440 A.D.

Size 29 inches high ; 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide